

THE PROBLEM OF LATIN WORDS



HOW TO FIND A **VERB** IN A LATIN DICTIONARY

Consider the number of forms that each Latin verb has. Ok, that's a trick question. **If you are new to Latin you may not know that your run-of-the-mill Latin verb can have 133 forms!** You should not be surprised that a Latin dictionary does not list more than a handful of forms for each verb (otherwise it would weigh 6 tons). What's worse, you have to know the first 'principal part' to find even the few forms that are listed.

A normal Latin dictionary will expect you to look at any verb form and figure out (backwards engineer) the first principal part of the verb you are looking for. Since you have not yet even started to master verbs you might think this idea sounds pretty reckless: *I have to backwards engineer a verb I know nothing about in order to find something out about it...and get it correct?* Yes, now go get a drink of cold water and then come back and I'll tell you how to live with this alarming fact.

As you let this news settle in, let me encourage you NOW to take Latin verbs very seriously. *Memorize and master each and every verb form as you are introduced to it.* Some crazy Latin programs (and even crazier Latin teachers) will **NOT** make you master verb forms and principal parts. This approach will make you feel comfortable and happy with Latin at first, bitter and angry later, completely clueless about Latin in the end. That is not going to happen on my watch.

This approach will make you feel comfortable and happy with Latin at first, bitter and angry later, completely clueless in Latin in the end.

Do not believe that you can passively learn any of them by sleeping on your Latin text book or by finding them in a chart every time you translate a sentence. This will not work. You will fail. Do not try it.

You **MUST** plumb the depths of your willpower to master these endings. Consider yourself forewarned: *many Latin students through the centuries have believed that he or she will just "sort of remember" these endings without any real effort.* **NONE OF THESE INDIVIDUALS EVER MASTERED ANY REAL LATIN.** You must make flashcards and practice with them every chance you get.

WHY FLASHCARDS? SO LAST CENTURY!

The best way to learn any new language is to involve as many senses as possible. A good set of flashcards is an excellent way to accomplish this basic study requirement. Many software companies make zillions of dollars by making this technique flamboyant. The technique remains essentially unchanged and the paper versions don't require electricity.

Flashcards can be created in a compact form and you can stick them in a purse, backpack or pocket to use whenever there is a lull in the action of your day (a car commute, for example).

Students frequently ask me about purchasing pre-printed flash cards. Save your money. Unless your handwriting is illegible or if you are unable to physically use flash cards, the process of creating the cards is part of the benefit of flash cards. Don't shortchange yourself.

HOW TO CREATE FABULOUS VERB FLASH CARDS

1. You will want to write out the flash card clearly and legibly so you may need special (albeit low-tech) equipment. My favorite two supplies?

- a. [vis-ed](#) blank cards
- b. *Extra Fine-point* Sharpies or gel pens or anything that makes marks to your liking (beware, thicker sharpies soak through even really good card stock)
 - feel free to create a color code: maybe blue for verbs, red for nouns, green for adverbs—doesn't matter which color choice, just be consistent

side 1	side 2
Present Active Indicative 1st person singular form (1st principal part)	2nd, 3rd and 4th principal parts Meaning (or range of meanings)
laudo	laudare, laudavi, laudatum praise

example

2. Write the CORE verb form on one side (*laudo* in our example)—this is usually the first principal part known as the “dictionary form.”
 - a. Don't give yourself any other clues for this side of the card—less is more.
3. On the reverse side write:
 - a. The other three principal parts (*laudare, laudavi, laudatum*, in our example. Some verbs will have fewer, none will have more)
 - b. The meaning of the verb (*praise* in our example)
 - c. BEWARE: a word may have a wide range of meanings. *Video*, for example, means: *to see; observe, understand*. In the textbook (and here in this example) there is a semi-colon separating the two fairly different ideas of “seeing” and “understanding.” You must learn that the verb can represent both concepts! Mark down the full range of meanings on the back of your card.
4. Don't be stingy: if you mess up a card, throw it away and start over. Didn't you buy the 1000 vis-ed blank card set?!

USING YOUR FLASHCARDS EFFECTIVELY

In a minute we will talk about making flashcards for other types of words. Before we go any further, let's talk about *using your flash cards*. I can hear some of you saying, “Duh! It only has two sides! How complicated can it be?”

Let me make it clear to you that when it comes to using flash cards properly, you are going to be your own worst enemy.

Wrongo, tiny ones! Let me make it clear to you that when it comes to using flash cards properly, you are going to be your own worst enemy. For some of you, an evil twin (or triplet if you are already a twin) will frequently talk you into *lazy flash card use*. Your Latin grade may depend on how often you listen to your evil twin.

SCENARIO 1 IN WHICH YOUR EVIL TWIN IS IN CHARGE OF THE FLASH CARDS

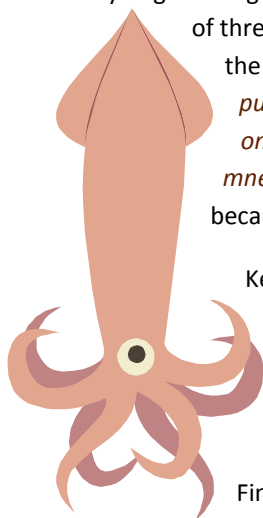
You spend 10 minutes scrawling new flashcards for the chapter. You punch holes in the corners of each card and bolt them permanently into place with the other 40 cards you made earlier in the semester. You flip through the new cards and get 14 out of 20 *almost* correct. You flip through them a second time and get 16 out of 20 *correctish*. You realize that you are thirsty and wander into the kitchen. Your flash card session ends unceremoniously and your quiz score is doomed.



SCENARIO 2 IN WHICH YOU, THE LATINIST, IS IN CHARGE OF THE FLASH CARDS

You spend 20 minutes creating new flashcards for the chapter using your cool color code for nouns, verbs, etc. and you say them aloud in an impressively booming tone that wakes your hamster, dog or cat (if you share a room with a sibling, choose a tone that will wake him or her as well). You pull your whole deck of flash cards out of your backpack or purse where you have them handy for dull moments during the day. You take the new cards and *shuffle them mercilessly into the deck of well known vocabulary words*.

Now you go through each card with side 1 showing. Toss any card for which you hesitate for more than the count of three back into the review stack; victories get tossed onto a second pile that can be ignored until the next review session. Reshuffle the review pile mercilessly (*you can't reshuffle if you've punched holes and fastened them -- so just don't punch holes and fasten them! Rubber bands only!*) Repeat the exercise until you get down to a few stubborn words. For these you will need *mnemonic devices* (memory aids). For example, you can remember that *quid* means "what" because now you picture yourself getting attacked by a giant squid and shouting "What!?!"



Keep reshuffling until you get the meaning correct for all 60 cards (your original 20 plus all your old ones). You may want to repeat this process until you get all of the principal parts, gender, conjugation, declension, etc., correct. **YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BE STRICT WITH YOUR EVIL TWIN WHO HAS BEEN URGING YOU TO GO DO SOMETHING ELSE AFTER THE FIRST 15 MINUTES PASSED!**

Finally, flip the deck so that only side 2 is up. Now you are working backwards from the meaning to the dictionary form! Repeat the process of sorting and shuffling until you get through them all successfully (you can SPELL the dictionary form, too). Fasten them all together with a rubber band, toss them into your backpack or purse, and get something victorious to drink in the kitchen.

TAKE THE STREETLIGHT CHALLENGE: FOR PASSENGERS ONLY

1. Go through your set (periodically remove all the cards that you "pass" 100% of the time) in the amount of time it takes for a light to turn from red to green.
2. If you can't do it, you need more work--study hard up until the next stop light and try it again until you can give yourself a 100% pass.

3. Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. Sometimes you can remember a vocabulary word simply because of the card that precedes it. Who needs that? Shuffle!

HOW TO LOOK UP A NOUN IN THE LATIN DICTIONARY

Latin grammarians made rules a long time ago about how to put together Latin dictionaries but they did so only after consulting the people in the printing industry. Latin dictionaries are designed to be portable and economical. Listing every noun and verb form would be prohibitive.


When you look up a Latin noun, here is what you will see in a Latin dictionary:

1. Nominative singular form of the noun.
2. Genitive singular form of the noun or just the genitive ending (-ae, for example).
3. Gender of the noun (m., f., or n. stands for masculine, feminine and neuter)
4. English meanings
 - Don't gripe about the range of meanings for Latin words. Any language that was spoken for over 1000 years on multiple continents is bound to experience a range of meanings.

Say you are translating a sentence with a noun in the accusative plural. You will backwards engineer the noun to determine its nominative singular form. This is not as difficult as it sounds. It is a system that works pretty well and nobody has come up with any better ideas.

HOW TO MAKE A NOUN FLASH CARD

If you are using sharpies, always use the same color for nouns. This is the type of visual information that may be enough to jog your memory.

side 1	side 2
Nominative Singular Form	Genitive singular form Gender Meaning (or range of meanings)
Puella	puellae F. girl 

example

A noun flash card should contain all four items important to a dictionary entry (nominative singular form, genitive singular form, gender, and meaning). Write only the nominative singular on side 1, all the rest of the information on the side 2. When you study this flash card, be sure to make yourself "pass" on both sides, going both directions.

Some people like to add a doodle of reality based nouns on side 2 (like *girl*). Don't spend too much precious time on this task since there's a lot more to come in the future.

HOW TO MAKE A FLASH CARD FOR EVERYTHING ELSE:

The general rule is to put a single Latin word or ending on one side, and any identifying data that you need on the other. Decide on (and write down) a system so that a certain color is only associated with a certain part of speech. You will need to develop your own system for making flash cards for grammar or endings—I like to use black for grammar and endings. With a bit of creativity, anything that needs to be memorized may be placed on a card.